



## Neglect

**Child neglect is the most common form of child maltreatment reported to public child protective services.** In 2002, neglect accounted for more than 73% of the children accepted for referral by Washington State Child Protective Services. Nationally, neglect accounted for more than 37% of all maltreatment fatalities. In 2002, that resulted in 347 neglect-related fatalities – almost one per day.

But what is neglect? The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) defines neglect as “a type of maltreatment that refers to the failure to provide needed, age-appropriate care.” It is usually typified by an ongoing pattern of inadequate care and is readily observed by individuals in close contact with the child.

In our state, neglect is narrowly defined as: *an act or omission that evidences a serious disregard of consequences of such magnitude as to constitute a clear and present danger to the child's health, welfare, and safety.*

The “clear and present danger” definition can often mean that a child experiences significant neglect for a long period of time before any action is taken to protect him or her. Neglect is often hard to identify as it does not present itself in the form of bruises or broken bones but rather in psychological, emotional, behavioral and interpersonal disorders over the long term. The effects of neglect have been clearly linked to show negative impact on a child’s early brain development and ability to thrive.

---

**The effects of the childhood environment, favorable or unfavorable, interact with all the processes of neurodevelopment.**

- Dr Bruce D Perry,  
*Childhood Experience and the Expression of Genetic Potential*

---

The current ‘ecological approach’ to understanding the causes of child maltreatment emphasizes the many complex factors that interact to place children at greater risk of abuse and neglect. The most recent National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect found that “family income was significantly related to maltreatment rates in nearly every category of maltreatment.” The incidence study shows that, by comparison with children living in families with annual income of \$30,000 or more, children living in families with annual incomes below \$15,000 per year were 44 times more likely to be neglected.

*It can't be overemphasized that only a very small minority of low-income parents abuse or neglect their children.* But the relationship between poverty and child maltreatment also can't be ignored. It provides important clues for helping focus on the right prevention programs, practice and policies.

WCPCAN believes that neglect is an issue that needs greater recognition and awareness as it is often overlooked as a less serious type of abuse, when, in fact, it can have many longer term impacts on a child’s development.